

Will Opportunity Knock Again For Guzman?

Written by Dan Horgan
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Joan Guzman may be the world's best pound-for-pound fighter. He just hasn't had the chance to prove it yet.

For the past year and a half, the undefeated and exceptionally skilled Guzman has suffered both from the politics of boxing and his own lack of professionalism. The sport's biggest names have avoided him, but he's failed to partake in title fights due to weight and visa issues. He's had trouble catching breaks, but when things do fall in his favor, he doesn't give himself the opportunity to capitalize on the good fortune.

Last week, the WBO denied Guzman the right to challenge Tim Bradley for the 140-pound champion's belt. The fight, which had already been drawn up and signed, would have taken place on Showtime's August 1st card - an excellent forum for Guzman to display his talents. But again, Guzman's career was pushed back, sending him further away from boxing's spotlight - a place he may now never reach.

Things didn't always look this bleak for the 33-year-old Guzman. For the first ten years of his career, the Dominican was on a fast track to being one of boxing's best.

Rising through the ranks, Guzman was a hot prospect, knocking out foes at 122 pounds in both the Dominican Republic and the United States. He won his first title in just his 18th fight in 2002, and he schooled former champion Agapito Sanchez in his first defense in 2004.

In 2005, Guzman ventured north four pounds and easily outpointed energetic southpaw Terdsac Jandaeng to put himself in the mandatory position to challenge exciting Scottishman Scott Harrison for the WBO featherweight title. The potential matchup had die-hard fight fans drooling at the mouth, as one of the sport's purest boxers in Guzman would go against a hard-hitting brawler in Harrison, who had been champion for over two years. But the bout never happened, as Harrison pulled out, citing teeth problems.

So without a fight, Guzman inked with the rapidly rising Golden Boy Promotions, who matched him up with rugged 135 pounder Javier Jauregui on the undercard of Oscar De La Hoya-Ricardo Mayorga. Despite moving up nine pounds in weight, Guzman boxed circles around his Mexican opponent, winning a near-shutout decision on a huge platform.

The win set up a bout with talented 130-pound champion Jorge Rodrigo Barrios on the undercard of Marco Antonio Barerra-Rocky Juarez. Guzman again shined, using his fast hands and defensive prowess to take a split-decision win for his second title in as many weight classes.

In 2007, Guzman took on his toughest challenge to date in Mexican Humberto Soto. At the time, Soto was considered one of the sport's most dangerous fighters; ESPN.com's Dan Rafael even said Soto could beat superstar Manny Pacquiao. But Guzman outclassed the rugged

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Soto over 12 one-sided rounds. Soto, who had tore through his previous 22 opponents, didn't have any answers for the quick and skilled Guzman, who was finally finding his way onto pound-for-pound lists.

But after the Soto win, Guzman started shooting himself in the foot. He failed to secure a visa in time to fight champion Alex Arthur last spring, and he weighed three-and-a-half pounds over the lightweight limit the day before his bout with champion Nate Campbell last fall. Both fights were called off because of Guzman's conduct.

And now that the WBO has denied Guzman another title opportunity, the super-skilled fighter's opportunities are limited. Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez, who have conveniently kept away from Guzman, have moved on to bigger and better things, and Campbell may very well get the title fight with Bradley that Guzman was denied. The rest of the 140-pound division is rather weak, and it's doubtful that Guzman will land another big fight at 135 pounds, considering he couldn't make the weight against Campbell.

It's a shame that Guzman has yet to fulfill his potential because he could very well be the best boxer in the world. But it's difficult to pity a pug whose lack of preparation for title fights results in missed opportunities.

Quick Questions:

-Why is Kali Meehan the number-one rated heavyweight in the world, according to the WBA? He's beaten no one of note in the past year and a half, and he's only fought sparingly since being crushed by Hasim Rahman in 2004. That ranking baffles me.

-Why doesn't Andre Berto take on Kermit Cintron? If they fought, the two could graduate from 'Boxing After Dark' to 'World Championship Boxing.'

-Why is Matthew Hatton being discussed as a potential opponent for Zab Judah on the undercard of Floyd Mayweather-Juan Manuel Marquez? That's a dangerous mismatch.

-Now that he's out of jail, will Scott Harrison come back? It's never too late for that Harrison-Guzman fight to happen.